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ABSTRACT

An impact evaluation of the Spanish/English component of the federal Bilingual Education Program (BEP) was done by the American Institutes for Research (AIR) between 1974-76. The AIR evaluation took three years, cost $2 million, and examined many aspects of the BEP. This paper explores the influence of the AIR evaluation on the 1978 reauthorization of the BEP. The evaluation had a greater influence on the Executive Branch then on Congress. The Executive Branch institutionalizes solicitation and utilization of evaluation to a greater degree than does Congress. Because Congress must deal with the entire spectrum of legislation, it must amalgamate more information--of a different nature--than the Executive. Congress placed greater weight on the media and constituent testimony then on the AIR evaluation findings in developing Title VII's 1978 reauthorization. However, as long as the issues which were addressed in the AIR evaluation remain important issues in the BEP, the findings of that evaluation will continue to influence the incremental evolution of bilingual education policy. (Author/RL)

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Evaluation and Incrementalism:

The AIR Report and ESEA, Title VII

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Introduction: Federal Program Evaluation and Policy-Making

There is considerable interest in the influence of program evaluation on educational policy. Literature produced in the mid 1970's claimed that evaluation was of little use for policy making because it was not timely, did not address policy makers' concerns, and did not produce clear conclusions and recommendations. A new breed of social scientists, who specialize in "social science utilization for policy making," emerged. They, particularly Caplan, Weiss, and Rich, found that social science and evaluation research findings are used by policy makers in a variety of ways.

This paper proposes that evaluation influence is a function of the incremental nature of policy making. While we have evidence that evaluation is "used" in many ways by policy makers, it is almost impossible to attribute particular "policies" to research or evaluation findings.

Much misunderstanding about the role of evaluation in policy development derives from too narrow a definition of policy. Policy is more than individual decisions. "Policy" encompasses the universe of possible decisions about a social issue or program.

It is not easy to get a handle on "the policy process." <u>There is no monolithic "process</u>." Many kinds of policy are made by many actors at various levels of government, in the legislative and executive branches. Policy is made in many ways. Some are routine and predictable; others are not. Understanding policy making for one program at a given time does not necessarily explain policy development later, or for another program. The process, as well as the substance, is dynamic.

> A federal education decision made in 1965 in the Johnson years in parts barely reflects the same process during the Nixon tenure (Summerfield, 4).

History cannot, however, be ignored. A program's past determines policy evolution. Any program changes gradually, incrementally, and is constrained by current implementation policies.

> Policy making is incremental in three senses: It occurs within the limits of a slowly evolving political culture; it is built on and related to existing policy; and it draws from existing policy models. This does not imply that the status quo is forever frozen, but that policy development will be evolutionary rather than revolutionary. It also suggests that in the short run the broad outlines of future policy development are predictable (Gladieux and Wolanin, 257).

This will become clear as we trace the influence of an evaluation of one federal education program.

Understanding the use of evaluation in federal policy making requires knowledge of both evaluation and policy making. One must realize the appropriate uses of evaluation -- its strengths, its weaknesses, what implications can be drawn from research findings, how these implications can be dealt with. Similarly, one must know how policy is made, what kinds of issues government involves itself in, and what results that involvement is expected to achieve. Evaluators who expect their work to have an immediate impact on policy will be disappointed. Although it is not dramatic, incremental policy changes are important results of program evaluation.

Description of the Study

To investigate the influence of evaluation on federal education policy-making, the author examined the 1978 reauthorization of The Bilingual Education Act (Berke, 1980). That study described the program

evaluated, defined the policies governed by the program, and how they were made. The study explored the inception and expectations of one evaluation, the dissemination of findings, and the "use" made of them.

An impact evaluation of the Spanish/English component of the federal Bilingual Education Program was done by The American Institutes for Research between 1974-76. Berke studied reauthorization policy development during the 18 months between publication of the AIR interim findings and passage of The Education Amendments in November 1978. The study was a step-by-step account of:

1) the usual function of governmental units which make and affect bilingual education policy,
2) the use of research findings by those units, and,
3) the influence of AIR findings on the 1978 reauthorization of The Bilingual Education Act.

The AIR evaluation took three years, cost $2 million, and examined many aspects of the Spanish-English Bilingual Education program. The three-volume report included information on teacher and aide characteristics, costs, classroom procedures and environment (AIR Overview of Study Findings). In spite of the wealth of information contained in the evaluation, three findings completely overshadowed the rest. These findings were: 1) only one-third of the children enrolled were of limited-English ability, 2) 86% of the project directors reported not moving children out of the program when they could function effectively in regular classes, and 3) the target children were not performing better than the control group. The evaluation provided extremely negative evidence about a highly controversial program at a time when the program was the object of unfavorable media attention (Epstein's Washington Post

article, June 5, 1977, and the 60 Minutes segment, "Why Johnny Can't Read," February 26, 1978). Because these findings were consistent with other information (GAO report, local evaluations, Departmental and Congressional concerns), the evaluation was used as ammunition against the bilingual program.

The findings were bandied about in the bureaucracy, in Congress, in the research community (where AIR's methodology came under attack), in the media, and finally, among interest groups and constituents. During the development of reauthorization policy, everyone with a vested interest in the program or the evaluation was heard from. ASPE staff noted,

> By the time the thing (reauthorization policy development) was over, we had talked with everybody who could conceivably have a position, and considered their view (Chapman and Truex interview, 8/7/78).

The considerable attention to the evaluation findings insured that they would be "used" in routine reauthorization policy development. This negative attention mobilized program advocates to marshall evidence of program success, and to discredit the AIR evaluation methodology and findings. The net effect of the publicity and controversy surrounding the evaluation was to increase the breadth and intensity of reauthorization policy development.

Influence of the AIR Evaluation on Executive Branch Reauthorization

In the course of developing Title VII reauthorization policy, the Department Of Health, Education and Welfare carefully scrutinized the bilingual program, and determined goals for the program's future. The AIR findings helped initiate a thorough program investigation in the bureaucracy. The program was examined to see why the evaluation showed

poor student achievement, enrollment of students who were not the neediest, and widespread existence of Spanish maintenance programs. While the AIR evaluation was not solely responsible for this scrutiny, its findings assured more than pro forma attention to reauthorization policy development for ESEA, Title VII.

The influence of the AIR findings occurred through the usual bureaucratic procedures for determining program policy. The Administration's proposals for Title VII reauthorization were influenced by many factors. The program's past, the President's views, constituents, media coverage, bureaucratic constraints, local implementation constraints, evaluation findings, and what compromises could be made by people with divergent views on bilingual education all influenced the Administration proposals. Even such negative evaluation findings did not result in recommendations to drastically modify the program. Past program direction was not reversed because new information (the AIR evaluation) was available. That information was amalgamated into an existing context and a current Title VII Program.

Events outside government influenced internal policy making. The 60 Minutes segment "Why Johnny Can't Read" and Noel Epstein's Washington Post article "The Bilingual Battle" (June 5, 1977) sent repercussions throughout the Department. This media attention moved the Department to take policy action to "fix up" the program. Because the AIR findings were consistent with the media message, the Department sought to remedy the problems pointed out. On the other hand, the negative evaluation findings galvanized advocates of bilingual education to lobby in support of the program. They attempted to discredit the AIR findings and show that the program was accomplishing more than the evaluation indicated. Evidence

provided by program advocates balanced the negative evidence supplied by the evaluation, Epstein, and 60 Minutes.

The AIR findings influenced executive branch policy development in a variety of ways. Individual organizational units "used" the findings selectively in accordance with their normal functions. The Office of Bilingual Education tried to discredit the evaluation and garner support for the Bilingual Education Program. The OE budget office cited the AIR findings to support holding the line on funding to school districts, but greatly increasing funding for bilingual education research (by $10,000,000). The National Center for Education Statistics used the AIR results to justify 1980 Census questions on language background. The AIR Report raised questions which could not be answered from a small data-base, so NCES wanted to include language questions on the 1980 Census to provide a large data base.

At the Commissioner's Office, the AIR evaluation was seen as one more piece of evidence that the program was not operating as it should. The Assistant Secretary for Education hoped that the AIR study would result in more bilingual education research, over which she had statutory authority. Expanding research in bilingual education would thus increase her policy control.

The HEW Legislative Office determined which policies to deal with legislatively, and which to leave for subsequent regulations. The AIR results supported Departmental policy to focus the program on teaching English and to limit duration of services. These became legislative recommendations. At the Office of the HEW Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE), the policy goal was to develop an ESEA reauthorization package that reflected the views of the Carter Administration, but also incorporated information from other sources.

The Department proposed five changes in Title VII policy, four of which were supported by the AIR evaluation findings. The Administration's final proposals for bilingual education were to:

1) define target children as those "with limited English language skills" who "have difficulty speaking, reading, writing, or understanding instruction in the English language,"

2) increase the research authorization by $15 million,

3) limit federal funding to a school district or project to five years, with federal funding gradually decreased (to encourage local assumption of the program),

4) increase parent participation, and

5) introduce "supplement not supplant" language to emphasize local responsibility for providing an appropriate educational program for children with limited English language skills (Legislative Proposals, 35-41).

Thus, the AIR results influenced Departmental recommendations for Title VII, but the process was hardly a one-to-one influence of an evaluation finding leading straight to a reauthorization recommendation. Information from many sources was sorted and analyzed at many levels of the Department before final reauthorization policy was determined. Thus, one evaluation served multiple purposes.

The Administration's position on bilingual education was influenced by the AIR findings and Noel Epstein's Washington Post article (June 5, 1977). Reaction to these fostered a move within HEW to "get tough" and "straighten the program out." However, as the legislative proposals were developed, that attitude was modified because an existing program can be altered only so much. Drastic changes in an existing program's essential

policies are very hard to make. The weight of history, inertia, and the complexity of the policy-making process foster gradual, incremental changes around the margins of existing programs.

In this case, the Executive Branch did propose rather drastic departures from existing bilingual education policy. The definition of target children was expanded to include language skills other than speaking; the large request for research funds was virtually unprecedented; and a five-year limit on the duration of funding to a local district was set. These policies were direct outgrowths of the AIR evaluation findings, albeit supported by other evidence. In the Executive Branch, then, the AIR evaluation findings had a strong influence on Administration proposals for 1978 reauthorization of ESEA, Title VII.

Influence of the AIR Evaluation and Congressional Reauthorization

To prepare for legislative reauthorization of The Bilingual Education Act of The Education Amendments of 1978, Congressional subcommittees and their staff were influenced by existing legislation, the Administration, hearings, research, program evaluations, GAO reports, the media, and members' own prior experience. Between 1974 and 1978, much information about the program had been generated. The GAO had studied the program and made several recommendations ("Bilingual Education: An Unmet Need"). A national impact evaluation of the Spanish/English ESEA Title VII Bilingual Education Program had been done. Four Congressional subcommittees (House and Senate education authorization and appropriation subcommittees for education programs) held extensive hearings. HEW presented legislative proposals in an Administration Bill. A television show (60 MINUTES: Why Johnny Can't Read) and a newspaper article ("The

Bilingual Battle: Should Washington Finance Ethnic Identities?") attracted considerable attention.

Although research and evaluation findings were used in the formation of Congressional reauthorization policy, many other influences also operated. Among important influences on national education legislation, policy research and program evaluation rank far below personal judgment of a few members of Congress and their staffs, views of trusted friends, assumptions about the economy, public opinion, and the views of major interest groups (Andringa, 79-80). Congressmen learn about the programs they oversee in a variety of ways. Some participants in the 1978 Title VII reauthorization were veterans of the 1974 Bilingual Education Act. They remembered what had been done in the past and why. Such institutional memory usually influences legislation toward conservative, incremental change rather than radical departure from existing policy.

The House Subcommittee on Elementary, Secondary, and Vocational Education members had a variety of interests in bilingual education, most of which involved how their constituents were served by the federal program. Committee staff sought information at hearings about the program's goals, whether it should be transitional or maintenance, whether funds should be used for startup costs or to fund ongoing services, etc., (Hearings Before the House Subcommittee on Elementary, Secondary and Vocational Education, 175, 176, 182). Approximately a fifth of a "day" of three days of subcommittee hearings was devoted to discussion of the AIR evaluation. It was one topic among many concerns ranging from minority teacher job security, starting a program for Chaldean speakers in Detroit, whether Native Americans received a fair share of program funds, the role

of private universities in training bilingual teachers, and coordination of Title VII with other services to similar populations.

While the Administration can select a few key issues on which to recommend legislative changes, Congress must deal with the entire scope of proposed legislation. The House Education and Labor Committee recommended changes in: the current approach to bilingual education, the students to be served, the types of services to be provided, whether funds should be for demonstration or service programs, teacher training, materials, parent involvement, coordination with other bilingual education programs, paperwork, and fund distribution (Report on H.R. 15, 84-90). Several of the Committee's recommendations were based on issues raised in the AIR evaluation, and the Committee Report on H.R. 15 credited it with highlighting problems in defining target students (85-86).

After the House and Senate authorizing and appropriations committees had presented their bills and worked out compromises in conference, the resulting Bilingual Education Act of 1978 ran to 17 pages, and dealt with a multitude of issues. Congress determines what the bilingual education program should be, whom it should serve, and how much it should cost. Each successive reauthorization of The Bilingual Education Act has been more specific than its predecessor. The 1978 Bilingual Education Act specified more clearly than the 1974 act that the purpose of the program is to teach English to children of limited English proficiency; that federal funds should be used to start programs which local districts should then assume funding (if they are able); that parents must be involved in writing proposals and determining program goals; that several studies must be conducted and the results reported to Congress by a particular date (PL 95-561). Less and less has been left to local discretion with each successive reauthorization.

Congress has assumed greater responsibility for mandating very specific details of the bilingual education program legislatively. The details of teacher training, parent participation, research, definition of target population, and the kinds of services to be provided were originally left to the Executive Branch and state and local agencies to specify. Since Congress has decided to handle these matters legislatively, it must examine considerable information in order to reach decisions in areas which were not formerly its domain.

The influence of any single information source decreases as the arenas for policy making expand. Thus, the influence of the AIR evaluation was considerably less on Congress than on the Executive Agency, because Congress dealt with so many aspects of the Program and used a greater variety and breadth (though not necessarily depth) of information on which to base policy recommendations. The influence of the AIR evaluation findings was also less profound in Congress than at the Executive Branch because Congress considered Title VII as one part of a complex legislative package. There were 15 titles in The Education Amendments of 1978. Compromises necessary to insure passage of the entire bill diluted the positions members might have taken on any individual section. The independent analyses of House and Senate subcommittees and committees were amalgamated to pass and fund The Education Amendments of 1978.

Thus, an Executive Branch program evaluation, The AIR Report, had considerably less impact on Congress than it had on Executive Branch reauthorization policy. In essence, Congress considerably diluted the Administration's proposals to "tighten up the program" (which had been largely based on the AIR findings). Congress did not target the program

on the children whose English skills were most deficient; indeed, the legislation allows a maximum of 40% children "whose language is English" in any class (PL 95-561). Although it moved toward establishing a five-year funding limit on individual districts, the criteria for terminating funds were such that any district demonstrating "need" would not have its funding ended. While the 1978 reauthorization did establish much more clearly than previous Bilingual Acts that the purpose of the program is to teach English, Congress did not go nearly as far as it could have in establishing exactly how that goal would be achieved. Pressure to "tighten up the program" was not nearly as great in Congress as it was in the Executive Branch. Thus, the AIR Report had a greater influence on Administration than on Congressional reauthorization policy making.

Analysis: Evaluation in the Policy Process

To fully understand how the AIR Report influenced the 1978 reauthorization of the Bilingual Education Program, one must know relevant history. The program was a child of the late '60s, the heyday of Great Society social program. President Lyndon Johnson had himself taught Spanish-speaking children in Texas, and recognized the need for special services for this group. Originally, the program hoped to help provide equal educational opportunity for language-minority children, to help maintain native languages and cultures, to foster multicultural understanding, to train bilingual/bicultural teachers, and to develop curriculum materials for many language groups. The program sought to develop and disseminate models of bilingual education practice, to foster local adoption of the models, and local assumption of the cost of bilingual education.

The program has tried to simultaneously achieve these many diverse goals. No consensus has been established on priority order of the goals; it is assumed that they are interrelated and progress in any one area will aid attainment of other goals. This simultaneous broad attack has not produced a clear victory on any front. It is difficult to demonstrate evidence of "program success." It is not easy to suddenly "tighten up" such a program, or to reverse the direction it had been moving in for ten years. Like a supertanker, an educational program cannot suddenly change its course. Change is slow and incremental.

Understanding how the role of evaluation influences policy making requires thorough knowledge of the policy making process. This implies knowledge of relevant history, for policy development is firmly grounded in what has gone before, what is currently feasible, and what is likely to be acceptable in the future. In other words, policy making, particularly at the federal level, is slow and incremental.

> Policy making is incremental in three senses: It occurs within the limts of a slowly evolving political culture; it is built on and related to existing policy; and it draws from existing policy models. This does not imply that the status quo is forever frozen, but that policy development will be evolutionary rather then revolutionary. It also suggests that in the short run, the broad outlines of future policy development are predictable (Gladieux and Wolanin, 257).

By 1978, the social climate which spawned the federal bilingual program education had changed considerably from the growth-oriented, expansionist social conscience of the previous decade. The late seventies was a time of economic contraction, desire for program accountability, and political conservatism. Some policy makers wanted to modify the bilingual program to reflect the current situation, but it is difficult to reverse the course of a ten-year-old program. The original intent of the program

(to help children with non-English native languages receive an equal educational opportunity) could not be negated, but there was considerable pressure to limit costs and offer only certain kinds of opportunity-enhancing experiences.

The political context influenced how the evaluation findings were used in the policy process. The negative findings about a controversial, politically vulnerable program were supported by evidence from other sources. The bilingual education program was portrayed negatively in the media. The President publicly advocated concentrating the program on rapid teaching of English. These forces added up to great pressure on the Administration to narrow the scope of the program, target it on the children whose English is most limited, and provide services of short duration. The Administrations's Title VII Proposals clearly reflected these pressures. Congress, on the other hand, was under less pressure to tighten up the program. While Congress was pressured to curb excess spending and make the program accountable, pressure on Congress to support the program outweighed pressure to tighten it up. Congress displayed skepticism of research, particularly in appropriations hearings (see Berke, Ch. 21), and based its final bilingual education reauthorization policy on broad consideration of the program's original goals, constituent preferences, and the need to accommodate conflicting positions.

The resulting legislation moved slightly in the direction of "tightening up" the program, targeting services on children with greatest need, and requiring local school districts to demonstrate their need for federal support of bilingual education. The legislation mandated several research studies to increase the knowledge base for future policy making. Other aspects of the legislation, however, impede implementation of the

tightening up efforts. Services cannot be concentrated on neediest children when the legislation allows up to 40% English speakers in any class (P.L. 95-561, Sec. 703 (4)(B)). Local districts have little incentive to assume the cost of the program when they must merely "demonstrate need" (P.L. 95-561, Sec. 721 (b)(Z)(A)) to continue receiving federal funds. Research on the development of entry/exit criteria may produce helpful information, but no one expects universal assessment criteria to be applied to this or any other population (speech by Rep. Jeffords, CR, 7/13/78, H6631). The 1978 reauthorization of the Bilingual Education Act perpetuated multiple, conflicting program goals.

The influence of the AIR evaluation on the 1978 Bilingual Education Act was tempered by the incremental nature of policy development. Program evaluation findings were "used" by policy makers who remembered ten years of program history -- and much else. New information was placed in a rich context; it was analyzed and weighed against other information. Although ten years of program history acts as a conservative force, keeping the program essentially on its current course, this case study supports the premise that evaluative information can influence shifts in policy direction.

Carol Weiss has provided evidence that evaluation can help policy makers conceptualize issues. She found that policy makers were "enlightened" by research that

> implies the need for major changes in philosophy, organization, or services, and that raises new issues or perspectives -- even when the findings imply actions that are not currently acceptable in the political system. Such research will not affect today's decisions, and yet the decision makers say that it is useful -- and likely to be used...(Decision makers distinguish) between information and recommendations that can help to solve problems and research that opens new avenues for perceiving and thinking and mapping the decision-making terrain (Weiss, 1977).

The AIR findings served this "enlightening" function, particularly in the Executive Branch.

The AIR interim findings played a catalytic role in raising serious questions about the goals of the bilingual program -- who it should serve, for how long, its relation to other federal programs, its budget allocations, and how to measure success. While such questions are normally asked in the reauthorization process, the negative AIR findings prompted more thorough scrutiny of the program than might have occurred otherwise. The evaluation findings influenced Administration recommendations that the program should focus on teaching English, limit the duration of funding to local districts, and greatly increase the research effort in bilingual education. Other policy options were discussed, but held in abeyance until additional information was available and "the time is ripe."

The very discussion of such policies as merging Title VII with Title I and changing from competitive grants to a formula delivery system confirms the role of evaluation in conceptualizing policy issues. Such departures from existing bilingual education policy might not have been considered had it not been for the AIR findings. The influence of the AIR evaluation on bilingual education policy cannot be definitively assessed 18 months after its publication. The evolutionary, incremental nature of educational policy making assures continued influence of that evaluation beyond the 1978 reauthorization of ESEA, Title VII. As long as the issues which were addressed in the AIR evaluation remain important issues in the Bilingual Education Program, the findings of that evaluation will influence the evolution of bilingual education policy.

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